

STDs in Racial and Ethnic Minorities

Public Health Impact

Surveillance data show higher reported rates of STDs among some minority racial or ethnic groups when compared with rates among whites. Race and ethnicity in the United States are risk markers that correlate with other more fundamental determinants of health status such as poverty, access to quality health care, health care seeking behavior, illicit drug use, and living in communities with high prevalence of STDs. Acknowledging the disparity in STD rates by race or ethnicity is one of the first steps in empowering affected communities to organize and focus on this problem.

Surveillance data are based on cases of STDs reported to state and local health departments (see **Appendix**). In many areas, reporting from public sources, for example STD clinics, is more complete than reporting from private sources. Since minority populations may utilize public clinics more than whites, differences in rates between minorities and whites may be increased by this reporting bias.

Observations

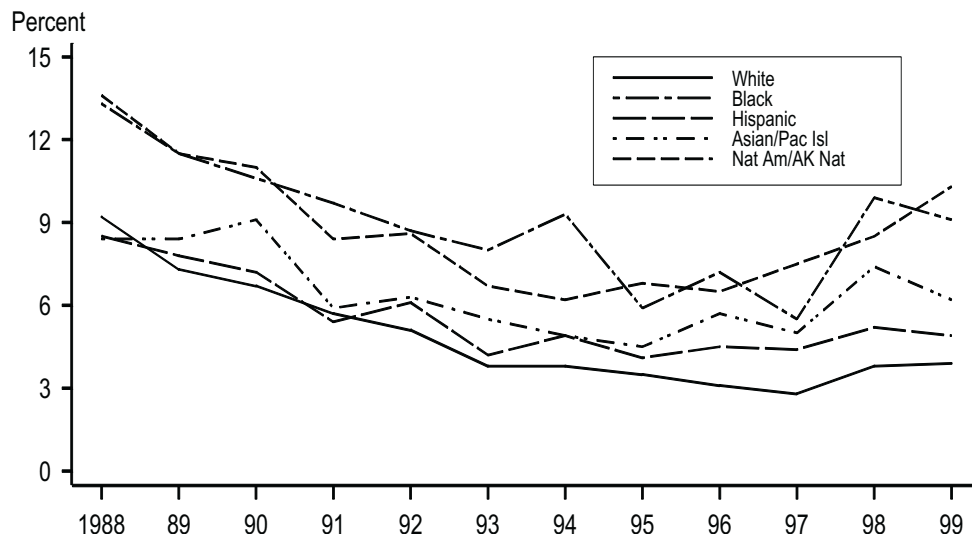
- Although chlamydia is a widely distributed STD among all racial and ethnic groups, trends in positivity in women screened in Health and Human Services Region X (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington) show consistently higher chlamydia positivity among minorities (Figure T).
- In 1999, chlamydia positivity among sexually active 15- to 30-year old women screened at clinics of the Indian Health Service (IHS) in four IHS regions ranged from 5.4% to 10.8% (Figure U).
- In 1999, 77% of the total number of cases of gonorrhea reported to CDC occurred among African-Americans (Table 12A). The reported rate of gonorrhea among African-Americans in 1999 was 848.8 cases per 100,000 persons. Among Hispanics, the 1999 reported gonorrhea rate was 75.3 cases per 100,000 persons. These rates are 30 and 3 times higher than the rate reported among non-Hispanic whites in 1999 of 27.9 cases per 100,000 persons (Figure 15, Table 12B).
- Gonorrhea rates were highest in 1999 among all racial, ethnic, and age categories for African-Americans aged 15 to 24 years. In 1999, African-American women aged 15 to 19 years had a gonorrhea rate of 3,691.0 cases per 100,000 females. This rate is 19 times greater than the 1999 rate among non-Hispanic white females of similar age. African-American men in the 15- to 19-year old age category had a 1999 gonorrhea rate of 1,996.5 cases per 100,000 males, which was 52 times higher than the rate among 15- to 19-year old white males (Table 12B). Among 20- to 24-year-olds in 1999, the gonorrhea rate among

African-Americans was 27 times greater than that among non-Hispanic whites (3,425.8 and 126.3 cases per 100,000 persons respectively) (Table 12B).

- Despite declines in gonorrhea rates for most age and race/ethnic groups during the 1980s, African-American adolescent females aged 15 to 19 years did not show a decline in rates until 1991 (Figure V). Similarly, declines among African-American adolescent males did not begin until 1992 (Figure W). However, from 1998 to 1999 gonorrhea rates among African-Americans declined by only 0.3% (851.2 and 848.8 cases per 100,000 persons respectively). During the same period, gonorrhea rates increased by 4% among Hispanics and 6% among Asian/Pacific Islanders while decreasing by 7% among American Indians/Alaska Natives (Table 12B).
- The most recent epidemic of syphilis was largely an epidemic in heterosexual, minority populations.¹ Since 1990, rates of primary and secondary (P&S) syphilis have declined among all racial and ethnic groups except American Indian/Alaska Natives. However, rates for African-Americans and Hispanics continue to be higher than for non-Hispanic whites. In 1999, 75% of all cases of P&S syphilis reported to CDC occurred among African-Americans (Table 23A). Although the rate for African-Americans declined from 16.9 to 15.2 cases per 100,000 persons between 1998 and 1999, the 1999 rate was 30 times greater than the rate of 0.5 per 100,000 persons among non-Hispanic whites. Between 1998 and 1999, P&S syphilis rates for African-American females aged 15 to 19 years declined by 17%, and for African-American males in this age group by 15% (Figures X and Y, Table 23B). Similarly, the P&S syphilis rate declined about 14% between 1998 and 1999 among young African-American adults aged 20 to 24 years. The 1999 rate of P&S syphilis among Hispanics was 1.8 cases per 100,000 persons, which is 4 times greater than the rate among non-Hispanic whites (Table 23B).
- In 1999, the rate of congenital syphilis was 57.9 cases per 100,000 live births among African-Americans and 20.4 cases per 100,000 live births among Hispanics. These rates are 29 and 10 times greater than the 1999 rate of 2 cases per 100,000 live births among non-Hispanic whites respectively (Figure Z). Compared with 1998, the 1999 rate of congenital syphilis decreased by 36% among African-Americans and by 29% among Hispanics.

¹Nakashima AK, Rolfs RT, Flock ML, Kilmarx P, Greenspan JR. Epidemiology of syphilis in the United States, 1941 through 1993. *Sex Transm Dis* 1996;23:16-23.

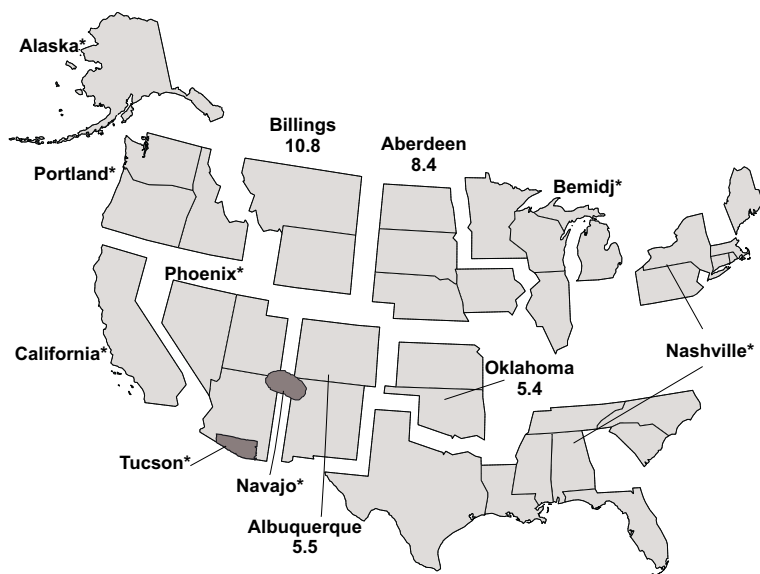
Figure T. Chlamydia — Positivity among women tested in family planning clinics by race and ethnicity: Region X, 1988–1999



Note: Women who met screening criteria were tested. Trends not adjusted for changes in laboratory test method in 1994 and 1999 and associated increases in test sensitivity.

SOURCE: Regional Infertility Prevention Program: Region X Chlamydia Project (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington)

Figure U. Chlamydia — Positivity among 15-30 year old women tested in Indian Health Service Clinics by IHS regions, 1999

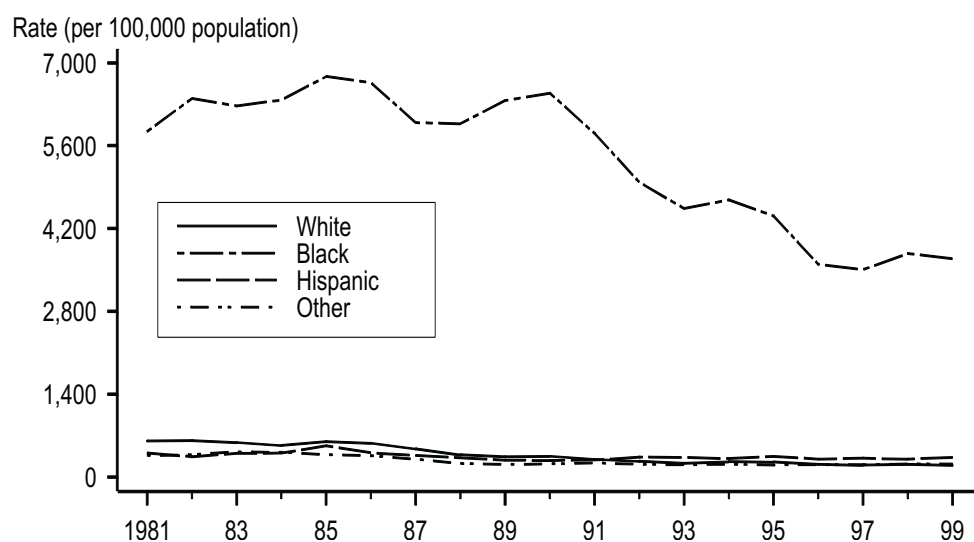


*IHS regions not reporting chlamydia positivity data during 1999.

Note: Albuquerque - chlamydia positivity data reported for April-December only.

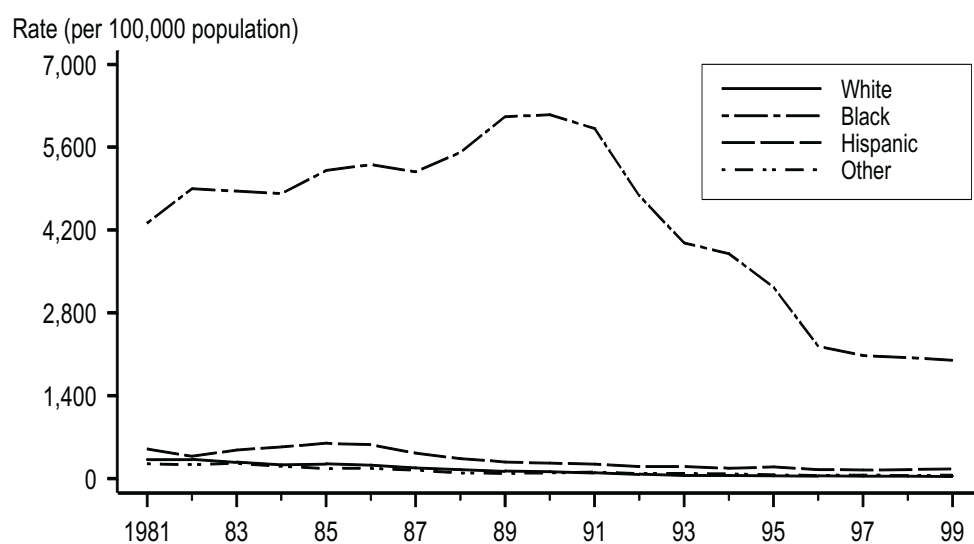
SOURCE: Indian Health Service

Figure V. Gonorrhea — Reported rates for 15-19 year old females by race and ethnicity: United States, 1981–1999



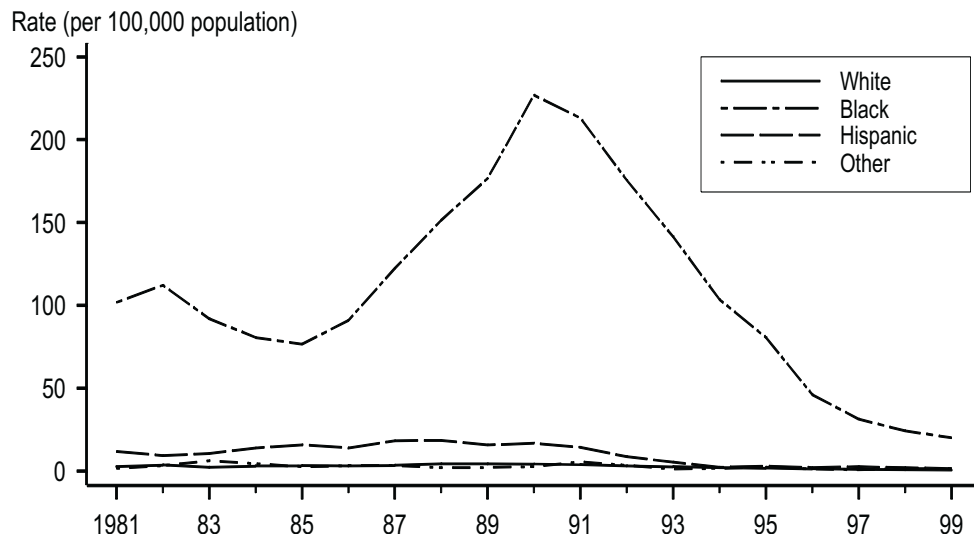
Note: Black, White, and Other are non-Hispanic.

Figure W. Gonorrhea — Reported rates for 15-19 year old males by race and ethnicity: United States, 1981–1999



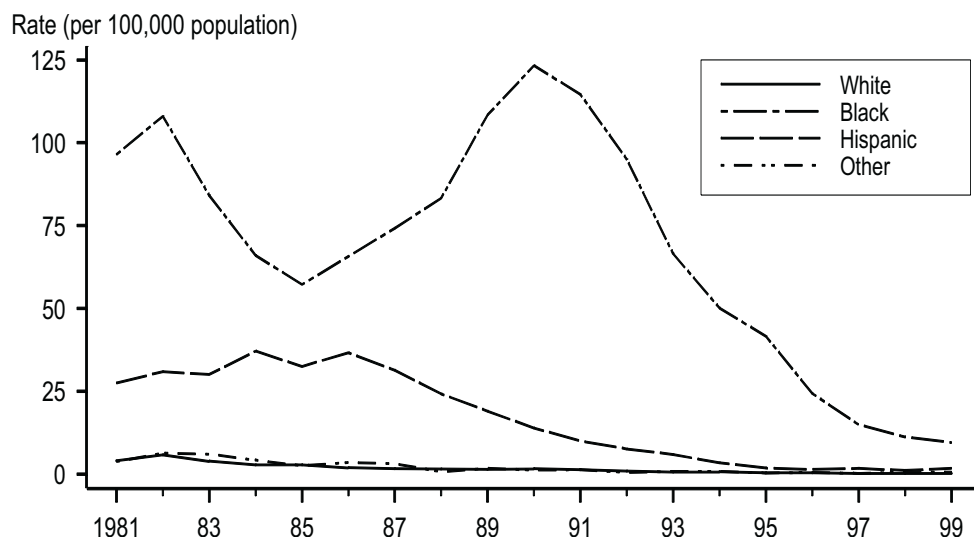
Note: Black, White, and Other are non-Hispanic.

Figure X. Primary and secondary syphilis — Reported rates for 15-19 year old females by race and ethnicity: United States, 1981–1999



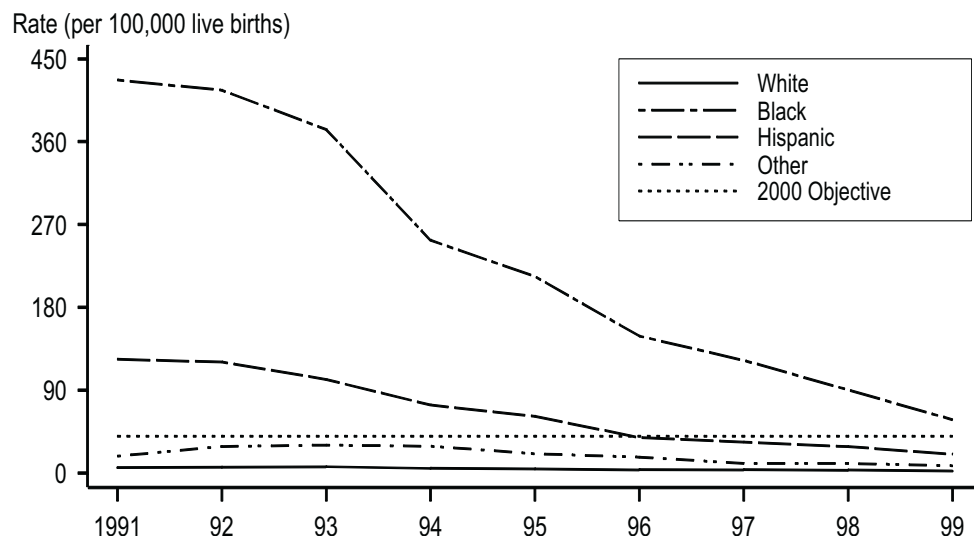
Note: Black, White, and Other are non-Hispanic.

Figure Y. Primary and secondary syphilis — Reported rates for 15-19 year old males by race and ethnicity: United States, 1981–1999



Note: Black, White, and Other are non-Hispanic.

Figure Z. Congenital syphilis — Rates for infants <1 year of age by mother's race and ethnicity: United States, 1991–1999



Note: Less than 5% of cases had missing race/ethnicity information and were excluded. Black, White, and Other are non-Hispanic.